

# LOVE'S CHALLENGE.

**A Heroic Sculptor's Bravery to Please His Sweetheart's Whim.**

In the elegant boudoir of rose satin, upholstered in gold, subtle perfumes pervaded the air.

Carelessly seated, almost reclining on a very low sofa, the Countess de Mauleon looked with indifferent eyes, which veiled no impression whatever, upon the hand-some sculptor, Pierre Denis, who was kneeling before her as a suppliant.

For about a year a game of love-making had been played between the two, cruel on one side, invincible on the other.

Pierre, who had acquired fame and even fortune, but not without untiring effort, happened to meet Mme. de Mauleon in some popular drawing-room. A few ideas exchanged on the subject of art, a few magnetic glances flashing from the reddish-brown eyes of the Countess, had sufficed to set afire the sculptor's heart.

Although Pierre Denis, at her feet, was for the tenth time that year repeating his delectable and at the same time troubous vows of love, of which she secretly dreamed, she remained indifferent and proud, and yet she did not disregard him.

"Do you not understand," said the sculptor to her, "that I love you, Jeanne—that I adore you?" Do tell me, I beg of you, what proof do you want?"

"Rise, my friend," said she, softly, "and believe me—your sincere love does not leave me quite indifferent."

As he sat down next to her she remarked:

"Just a little while ago you offered your life in exchange for my love. Well, I take you at your word. Risk it, then, to satisfy my caprice and I will love you."

"What shall I do? Command me. I am ready for anything."

"Listen; but first of all I must beg your pardon. You know I am original, and, they say, extravagant; perhaps I shall become cruel in asking of you a proof of love which is perilous."

"Pray, speak out," answered Pierre.

"Well, then, I should like to see you enter a lion's cage."

"Very well," he said, simply, "you shall be gratified, it less than a week. From now until then I do not want to see you; I will only write to let you know the place, day and hour when I am to satisfy your caprice."

This calm, dignified, this serenity of soul ready for anything to please her, deeply moved the proud young woman. A secret anguish threatened to devour her; what if he should die?

She was at the point of forbidding him to comply with the foolish demand; it seemed to her as if she must cry out that she loved him, that the proof already sufficed. Still, a feeling of pride held her back, and when her heart had finally vanished this it was too late; Pierre Denis had gone, saying, as he held his hands:

"In a week, I am yours forever, or else—I am in eternity."

Three days later the letter-carrier brought the following laconic note:

"Madame: To-morrow evening at 9 o'clock I shall enter the cage of the Tamer San Pietro. His tent is situated at Neuilly, on the left side of the avenue, near the Cocheray theater. Ever your devoted."

At last the terrible evening was at hand. The landau of the Countess stopped a few yards from the menagerie.

Presently the footman was despatched to the tamer with a sealed note containing a check for \$500 francs.

That proved a powerful incentive to take all necessary precaution in order to prevent an irreparable disaster. The tamer condescended to come in person to thank his very generous correspondent. Then, upon her request, he reserved for her the entire first row of seats.

It was only after his departure that the Countess noticed on the tent a great white sign on which stood out in blood-red letters the following sensational announcement:

"This Evening, at 9 o'clock. Extraordinary Performance. Entrance of a Genuine Amateur Into the Cage of Terrible Wild Beasts."

At reading this, which was so cruelly expressive, a shudder shook her whole frame. She was afraid—afraid of him. She ought to prevent this folly—there was still time to do so. But had she a right to do it? would it not be robbing her audacious friend of the satisfaction, the pride of the triumph?

And how would he judge her? Would he not simply place her in the rank of common, everyday women? Would he love her as much? Would he not then have proof of her weakness?

Well, the lot had been cast.

Then she alighted slowly and gravely entered the tent and occupied the place reserved for her.

At first she remained indifferent during the customary performance of the tamer, but little by little as the hour grew near she felt her heart beat more violently, the blood rushing to her temples in painful pulsations.

A few minutes elapsed after the departure of the tamer and Pierre Denis appeared at the entrance of the cage.

He had donned one of the costumes of the professional, and the odd suit—the clinging trunks—still enhanced his manly beauty.

The crowd, carried away at first sight, applauded vigorously, while the Countess, who was very pale, barely suppressed an exclamation.

"Pierre, I love you," she murmured. Suddenly he noticed her and greeted her with a quick glance.

Then hastily he went further into the cage, with hand thrown back, the whip high in the air, solid and boldly poised.

The beasts, three lions and two hyenas, seemed at first stupefied at his audacity. For an instant they remained motionless; their ears-green eyes stared fixedly at their new master. Then they began to crawl about maliciously as if in distress.

The whip whizzed in the air, suddenly striking the flanks of a lioness near by. She recoiled, giving forth a deafening roar, and one after the other the rest imitated her. The powerful hoarse voices formed a grand but terrible concert, while their ears were flattened against the nape of the neck and their sonorous sides resounded to the rhythmic beatings of their tails.

Pierre then made a step and struck Janitor.

## MRS. MORISINI IS DEAD.

**Mother of Victoria, Who Eloped with Coachman Schilling.**

**She Had Been an Invalid for Some Time.**

No date has as yet been set for the funeral of Mrs. Giulia Claudio Morisini, wife of Giovanni P. Morisini, the well-known banker, who died yesterday at the family residence, Riverdale-on-the-Hudson, in the fiftysixth year of age.

Mrs. Morisini has been an invalid for some time. She suffered from heart trouble and for a week her life has been desolate.

Mrs. Morisini was the mother of Victoria Morisini, who eloped with her father's coachman, Ernest Hentschel Schilling.

The anxious crowd remained silent. The Countess moved to the very bottom of her soul, dared not stir; her pupils were dilated with fright and with an almost insane stare she followed the terrible scene which was being enacted for her sake alone.

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